

Case Study: Partnership Development for Indigenous Tourism at Abegweit First Nation

Background

Indigenous tourism represents one of the fastest-growing segments of Canada's tourism industry, offering significant opportunities, particularly in communities rich in cultural heritage. Abegweit First Nation (Abegweit or the Band), a small Mi'kmaq community located in eastern Prince Edward Island (PEI), is keenly aware of this trend. With just over 400 Band members, the community recognizes the potential of Indigenous tourism as a pathway for both economic development and cultural expression.

Despite the opportunities, Abegweit encountered several challenges in its initial efforts to enter the Indigenous tourism sector. These challenges included a limited labour force, a lack of industry experience, and uncertainties about how to position itself within the market. In response to these challenges, Abegweit opted to partner with a non-Indigenous private tour company, Fairway Tours. This collaboration aimed to provide the community with quicker access to the market, industry expertise, and the ability to expand operations more effectively. While this partnership helped to overcome some of the above challenges, it also introduced new challenges.

Recognizing the need for more strategic partnership development, Abegweit is now at a critical juncture, reassessing its approach to ensure that future collaborations align more closely with its cultural values, operational capacity, and economic goals. Abegweit must also focus on building its labor force and addressing other capacity requirements that are essential for success in the tourism sector.

Indigenous Tourism in Canada

Understanding Indigenous Tourism

Indigenous tourism refers to travel experiences or tourism products that are majority-owned by Indigenous individuals or organizations, often reflecting the cultural heritage, traditions, and practices of Indigenous peoples. This form of tourism allows visitors to engage with Indigenous cultures through various activities, such as guided tours, cultural performances, storytelling, arts and crafts, and Indigenous accommodations and food services.

The goal of Indigenous tourism is to provide meaningful and respectful interactions that educate visitors about Indigenous history, values, and ways of life, while also benefiting Indigenous communities economically. It aims to empower Indigenous peoples by involving them in the planning and delivery of tourism experiences, ensuring that they retain control over their cultural narratives and practices.

In terms of defining Indigenous tourism, The Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) has recognized and adopted the following definitions:

Indigenous tourism: tourism businesses majority owned, operated and/or controlled by First Nations, Metis or Inuit peoples. These businesses should have a connection to and responsibility for the local Indigenous community and the traditional territory where they operate.

Indigenous cultural tourism: tourism businesses that not only meets the criteria for Indigenous tourism, but also offers cultural experiences or products that incorporate Indigenous culture. For instance, while a gas station owned by an Indigenous individual or community that serves tourists may be broadly

classified as an Indigenous tourism business, it may not be categorized under Indigenous cultural tourism unless it also provides unique cultural experiences or products that reflect Indigenous identity. Indigenous cultural tourism not only promotes the preservation of Indigenous cultures but also fosters reconciliation and understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

It's also important to note, that each nation or community may have its own definition of Indigenous tourism that may vary.

Indigenous Tourism Growth

In recent years, the Indigenous tourism sector in Canada has experienced significant growth, resulting in the creation of over 39,000 jobs and a GDP contribution of \$2 billion (Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada, 2024). As of 2019, there were approximately 1,900 Indigenous-owned and operated tourism businesses in Canada contributing to this upward trend. Recognizing the potential for further growth, ITAC aims to establish the country as a world leader in Indigenous tourism. Their ambitious goals include increasing the number of Indigenous-owned tourism businesses to 2,700, creating 60,000 jobs, and achieving a GDP contribution of \$6 billion by 2030 (Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada, 2024). To realize these objectives, significant capacity-building efforts will be necessary, focusing on:

- Infrastructure and destination development;
- Building a sustainable workforce; and
- Business development and promotion.

Achieving ITAC's goals requires active participation from communities across the country, as these initiatives cannot be managed solely by a national body. Engaging communities, including Abegweit First Nation, is essential to leverage the full potential for Indigenous tourism. Additionally, investments and partnerships from both the private and public sector will play a crucial role.

Indigenous Tourism in Mi'kmaki (The Atlantic Region)

Atlantic Canada is home to diverse Indigenous cultures, including Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, and Inuit peoples, who have enriched the region with their history, art, language, and traditions for over 12,000 years. The region also includes Indigenous peoples who have relocated from other parts of Canada.

Indigenous tourism in the Atlantic region has a significant economic impact, creating nearly 2,900 jobs and generating approximately \$76 million in labor income. It contributes \$108 million to the region's GDP and generates over \$225 million in revenue (Atlantic Policy Congress, 2023). In 2018, Indigenous tourism accounted for 5% of the region's overall tourism GDP (Atlantic Policy Congress, 2023). Atlantic Canada is home to just over 9% of the national total of 1,900 Indigenous businesses (Atlantic Policy Congress, 2023).

As of July 2023, the breakdown of Indigenous tourism businesses in the region is as follows:

- Transportation: 4%
- Gaming and Casinos: 5%
- Accommodations: 11%
- Festivals and Events: 11%

- Attractions: 12%
- Outdoor Adventure: 12%
- Food and Beverage: 16%
- Retail: 29% (Atlantic Policy Congress, 2023)

The Indigenous tourism sector in Atlantic Canada is showing promising growth. As the tourism industry recovers post-COVID-19, Indigenous businesses are well-positioned to thrive, particularly as travelers increasingly seek meaningful, transformative experiences. To capitalize on this opportunity, Indigenous businesses should focus on increasing their visibility and engagement through various marketing channels, particularly online and on social media, as these platforms are now the primary sources of information for potential visitors (Atlantic Policy Congress, 2023).

Indigenous Tourism in Epekwitk (Prince Edward Island)

In Prince Edward Island (PEI), the province is just beginning to acknowledge the potential of Indigenous tourism as a valuable contributor to the economy and a means to diversify its tourism offerings. PEI's most recent tourism strategy emphasizes the importance of Indigenous culture and experiences as integral to the Island's tourism landscape. It commits to supporting the development of Indigenous tourism initiatives while highlighting the need for collaboration with communities to create authentic experiences that reflect their cultural heritage (Tourism PEI, 2024).

Despite existing attractions like the Mi'kmaq Cultural Centre in Lennox Island and special events such as the Abegweit Mawi'omi, Indigenous tourism in PEI remains underdeveloped compared to other regions in Canada. Ongoing efforts aim to expand this sector through the development of partnerships among Mi'kmaq communities, tourism operators, and government agencies. Strengthening these collaborations can create more authentic and enriching experiences, which not only contribute to the local economy but also promote cultural awareness and support reconciliation efforts.

Overall Tourism in PEI

Tourism is vital to PEI's economy and one of its largest industries. PEI is renowned for its stunning natural landscapes, including picturesque beaches, rolling countryside, and coastal vistas, which attract visitors from Canada and beyond. Its rich cultural heritage, vibrant arts scene, and culinary offerings—particularly its famous seafood and potatoes—enhance its appeal as a tourist destination.

PEI hosts numerous events and festivals throughout the year, celebrating a wide range of themes from music and arts, to Indigenous culture and local agriculture, enriching the visitor experience. In recent years, there has been a growing focus on sustainable tourism practices and the development of Indigenous tourism, which aims to provide authentic experiences while promoting cultural preservation and economic growth within Indigenous communities.

Despite challenges, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, PEI's tourism sector has demonstrated resilience and is on a path to recovery. Ongoing efforts to enhance infrastructure, marketing, and community engagement are essential for ensuring long-term growth and sustainability.

Transportation and Accessibility

Visitors use a variety of transportation modes to reach Prince Edward Island, enhancing its accessibility and appeal. Many travelers arrive by air through Charlottetown Airport, which provides flights from major Canadian cities and seasonal routes from the United States. A substantial number of visitors also drive to PEI, particularly those from neighboring provinces like Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, thanks to the convenient access offered by the Confederation Bridge. Additionally, Northumberland Ferries facilitates ferry transport from Nova Scotia. During the summer and fall months, cruise ships become a vital source of visitors, with several cruise lines docking in Charlottetown and bringing a diverse array of international tourists for day trips. As of 2023, the Port of Charlottetown planned to welcome 96 ships to the Charlottetown Harbour for 2024, bringing in over 165,000 passengers). While cruise visitors tend to spend less per visit due to their shorter stays, this influx provides Island tourism operators access to a global market. Overall, the combination of transportation options caters to a wide range of demographics and makes the Island an accessible destination.

Visitor Demographics

PEI typically attracts around 1.5 million visitors annually, although this number can fluctuate based on seasonal trends, special events, and tourism campaigns. Most visitors to PEI come from a mix of domestic and international locations, with a significant portion traveling from within Canada. The largest group of visitors typically hail from neighboring provinces, particularly Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, due to their proximity and the ease of access provided by the Confederation Bridge and ferry service. Additionally, many tourists come from Ontario, especially major urban centers like Toronto. The United States is another important source of visitors, with travelers from states such as Maine and New York drawn to PEI's unique cultural and natural attractions. While international visitors make up a smaller percentage of the overall tourism numbers, those from countries like the United Kingdom, Germany, and Australia also contribute to the diversity of the Island's tourism demographic. This varied mix of visitors enhances the vibrancy of PEI's tourism industry, reflecting its broad appeal across different markets.

In terms of age demographics, families are a key visitor group, often coming during the summer to enjoy the Island's beaches and festivals. Older adults and retirees also make up a substantial part of the tourism scene, usually opting for longer stays during the off-peak seasons when they can enjoy a quieter atmosphere. This mix of visitors allows for a variety of attractions and experiences that cater to different interests.

Abegweit First Nation

Abegweit First Nation is a Mi'kmaq Band deeply rooted in a rich cultural heritage, with traditions passed down through generations. While the Mi'kmaq have occupied Prince Edward Island for over 12,000 years, Abegweit First Nation was established as a Band government in 1972, strategically separating from Lennox Island First Nation to better serve the Indigenous population on the eastern end of the Island. As a result, the Band is still relatively young in its governance and economic development journeys.

The Band is working diligently toward self-sufficiency, aiming to reduce financial dependency on the federal government by developing a sovereign wealth strategy that includes investments across various industries. One key area identified for growth is Indigenous tourism.

Abegweit First Nation operates from a relatively rural land base – consisting of three reserves in PEI: Morell, Rocky Point, and Scotchfort. Approximately half of the Band's population resides on reserve,

while the other half lives in off-reserve locations throughout PEI and beyond. Scotchfort reserve, home to most of the on-reserve population, as well as most existing businesses and the Band administration office, serves as the community's central hub. Located along the Veterans Memorial Highway, the second busiest highway in the province, Scotchfort sees thousands of vehicles pass by daily, especially during peak tourism season.

Scotchfort's strategic location, just 18 kilometers east of the provincial capital, combined with the nationwide surge in Indigenous tourism and the strong tourism economy of Prince Edward Island, creates an exceptional opportunity for the Nation to invest in tourism. These investments are designed to foster employment opportunities, preserve and share cultural heritage, and generate revenue.

Although the Band does not view tourism as the cornerstone of its sovereign wealth strategy, it recognizes that it can play an important role in enhancing the community's cultural vibrancy and providing meaningful employment. However, the Band faces challenges related to capacity, particularly in human resources and industry expertise. With a small population of around 400 Band members—half living on reserve and half off—and significant demand for authentic Indigenous experiences, there is a challenge in balancing this high demand with a limited number of Indigenous suppliers in the tourism sector. In response, the Band has initiated various tourism projects; however, the Band's administrative capacity is also constrained, with only one economic development officer on staff and no dedicated tourism personnel. These early pressures prompted the Band to pursue partnership development.

Abegweit First Nation: Initial Tourism Strategy

Acknowledging its capacity challenges, the Band prioritized partnerships as it entered the tourism market. Partnerships were prioritized due to the understanding that collaboration could help bridge the gap between limited resources and the increasing demand for authentic Indigenous experiences. By partnering with established tour operators, Abegweit aimed to leverage existing marketing channels, operational efficiencies, and extensive networks within the tourism industry.

Initially, the Band government believed that developing tourism experiences internally, through its economic development office would be the most effective way to expedite sector growth. This approach seemed logical given the Band's understanding of economic strategy, deep community knowledge, and the absence of private-sector interests at the time. However, the Band soon recognized that the labor-intensive nature of managing these experiences often diverted attention from other critical community responsibilities. This led to the Band reassessing the strategic value and feasibility of experience and product development.

Business Profile: The “Welcome to Abegweit” Tourism Experience

The Partners

In 2018, Abegweit First Nation received an unexpected yet promising opportunity when a private tour company, Fairway Tours, approached them. Fairway Tours, a well-established Island-based company, had been in the tourism business since 2010, specializing in creating memorable travel experiences throughout Canada and internationally. Their offerings included guided tours, customized travel packages, and group arrangements that highlighted local attractions, heritage sites, and natural

landscapes. Fairway Tours, specializing in pre-packaged vacations, provides tourists with peace of mind by handling transportation, accommodations, meals, and activities. Each group is assigned a Tour Director to coordinate with suppliers and enhance the overall experience for passengers. These guided vacations are designed to offer a worry-free travel experience, with opportunities to connect with like-minded travelers along the way.

Fairway Tours was working in collaboration with an American-based company, Venture America. Operating since 1990, Venture America specializes in guided vacations within the Americas, from Canada to South America. Like Fairway Tours, it emphasizes pre-packaged travel experiences, offering seamless journeys for its clients. Venture America is a subsidiary of a larger multi-national tour company and partners with reputable tour operators and local travel experts, much like Fairway Tours, to provide authentic and expertly guided trips.

Venture America aimed to expand its offerings by developing an Indigenous tourism experience on PEI. With access to a substantial client base, Venture America recognized the potential for a unique cultural experience that could appeal to their American clientele. Fairway Tours approached Abegweit First Nation with this opportunity, framing it as an exciting venture into the tourism industry with access to a well-established market.

Eager to explore this potential, Abegweit First Nation engaged in discussions with Fairway Tours. The initial enthusiasm was palpable, with Fairway Tours committing resources to build the community's capacity. This investment included workshops on customer service, cultural storytelling, and operational logistics, all aimed at empowering community members to assume various roles within the tourism experience, which was later named "Welcome to Abegweit."

By early 2020, after months of capacity-building efforts and partnership development, Abegweit was ready to welcome its first group of tourists. However, with limited experience in the tourism industry, the community faced challenges in establishing fair pricing and ultimately accepted the price suggested by Fairway Tours.

The Experience

Under the partnership with Fairway Tours and Venture America, a structured tourism experience was developed, attracting busloads of tourists—often averaging between 30 to 50 visitors per tour. Approximately 15 tours were planned each year from June to September, with dates set by the tour operators and little input from the community.

Each "Welcome to Abegweit" tour began with a 30-minute bus tour of Scotchfort, guided by a knowledgeable community member who highlighted significant landmarks and community buildings. After this introduction, guests were invited to a community facility for a cultural showcase featuring vibrant performances, including traditional drumming and dancing, and historical teachings about Mi'kmaw culture. This immersive experience, lasting around 1.5 hours, involved substantial participation from community members—four drummers, two dancers, the guided tour operator, and even the Chief—each playing a crucial role in delivering the experience. Additionally, the economic development officer dedicated significant time to organizing and preparing for each event, while support staff assisted with setting up and dismantling the venue.

Despite the enthusiasm surrounding the initiative, the labor-intensive nature of the operation quickly became apparent. Initially, the community was generating only \$13 per visitor from these tours, raising immediate concerns about financial sustainability. Recognizing that this amount was insufficient for a viable operation, Abegweit initiated negotiations with Fairway Tours. Ultimately, it was decided that Fairway Tours would exit the partnership, allowing Abegweit to work directly with Venture America. Although Fairway Tours expressed dissatisfaction with this decision—given the time and resources invested in capacity building—the Band was determined to pursue a more sustainable path.

Negotiations resulted in an increased rate of \$30 per visitor between Venture America and Abegweit First Nation. However, even at this higher price, the revenue generated barely covered the associated costs of the experience, particularly given the manpower required. Performers were often compensated with a \$100 honorarium for their time, meaning that even with high attendance, profit margins remained minimal. Community leaders began to question whether the investment of time and effort was truly worthwhile.

Questions arose about whether the overall financial return justified the significant time and energy invested by Band staff, many of whom were balancing these commitments with other responsibilities. As discussions progressed, it became evident that while the vision for Indigenous tourism was promising, the operational challenges and financial realities required a thorough re-evaluation.

Abegweit's journey into tourism was just beginning, marked by a blend of excitement, learning, and the urgent need for a sustainable strategy that genuinely reflected Abegweit's cultural heritage and economic aspirations.

Challenges Faced

The experience with Fairway Tours and Venture America brought to light several critical challenges that Abegweit had to navigate in the tourism sector:

Labor-Intensive Operations: Each tour required substantial involvement from multiple community members and Band staff, resulting in a significant strain on the Band's already limited human resources. This operational model left staff feeling overextended and unable to effectively fulfill their other responsibilities. The burden of managing tours, preparing cultural performances, and handling logistics diverted attention from other important community initiatives and long-term development goals.

Financial Viability: Despite negotiations aimed at increasing tour pricing, the revenue generated remained insufficient to cover the costs associated with performers, facilities, and other operational expenses. The financial model in place raised serious concerns about sustainability. Staff began to question whether the current structure was viable or if it required a fundamental redesign to ensure economic feasibility. The disparity between income and expenses led to increasing frustration and uncertainty about the long-term benefits of the partnership.

Inflexibility: Fairway Tours and Venture America maintained a rigid adherence to the established program, which restricted the Band's ability to adapt offerings based on community feedback, changing market demands, and financial realities. This lack of flexibility stifled creativity and hindered the potential for developing unique experiences that could better reflect the culture and values of the Abegweit community. The inability to make adjustments quickly left the Band feeling constrained and undervalued in the partnership.

These challenges prompted a pivotal decision for the Band: they opted not to renew their contracts with either Fairway Tours or Venture America. Instead, Abegweit began to explore other opportunities and development strategies within the tourism sector. This also marked a significant shift in their approach, as they aimed to be more proactive and strategic in future partnerships. Their goal was to avoid being caught off guard by opportunities that didn't align with their vision and could lead to operational challenges or imbalances in decision-making.

Discussion Questions

As community leaders came together to reflect on their experiences, a set of critical questions arose about the ideal structure for future tourism initiatives. These discussions focused on strengthening both cultural integrity and economic viability.

Strategic Partnership Development

1. What key lessons can Abegweit First Nation draw from its experiences with Fairway Tours and Venture America, and how can these insights shape future partnerships? Conduct a SWOT analysis on the "Welcome to Abegweit" tourism experience and Indigenous Tourism in Prince Edward Island.
2. Should Abegweit First Nation continue to prioritize partnerships with non-Indigenous entities to access broader markets and scale operations:
 - a. If yes, why?
 - b. If no, what alternative strategies should they explore?
3. What specific measures can be taken to safeguard the Band's financial interests and operational needs in future collaborations with external partners? What strategies or frameworks could have been utilized to negotiate more favorable terms in the partnerships with Fairway Tours and Venture America?
4. How can Abegweit ensure that cultural integrity and community values are maintained in its partnerships, and what guidelines or frameworks could support this goal?

Navigating the Balance: Community-Led Tourism

5. Should tourism initiatives continue to be managed by the Band Government, particularly through its Economic Development Office, or would a more privatized approach yield better outcomes in terms of flexibility and innovation? How could empowering local entrepreneurs enhance adaptability and foster creative solutions in the tourism sector?

6. What potential challenges might arise from shifting to a more privatized tourism model? How can the Band ensure that this transition aligns with the community's values, economic strategies, branding, marketing efforts, and long-term objectives?
7. What role does community engagement play in Indigenous tourism development? How can Abegweit actively involve its members in the planning and execution process to ensure their voices are heard, and what feedback mechanisms can be established for ongoing community input?
8. How can the Band enhance its internal capacity for tourism development? What training and resources are necessary to build human capital within the community?

Answers to Discussion Questions

1. Key Lessons from Experiences with Fairway Tours and Venture America

SWOT Analysis – Indigenous Tourism in Prince Edward Island

- **Strengths**

- **Cultural Richness:** PEI's Indigenous communities have a strong cultural heritage that dates back over 12,000 years on PEI.
- **Robust Tourism Ecosystem:** PEI has a strong and established tourism industry, with a consistent influx of visitors, especially during peak seasons, who may be open to exploring new cultural experiences.
- **Scenic Beauty and Natural Landscapes:** PEI's picturesque landscapes—such as its coastal cliffs, pristine beaches and woodlands—are ideal for integrating nature-based Indigenous tourism experiences.
- **Supportive Government:** Both provincial and federal governments have shown increasing support for Indigenous tourism initiatives. Programs and funding can aid in the creation of sustainable cultural tourism offerings.

- **Weaknesses**

- **Indigenous Tourism Infrastructure:** The infrastructure needed to support Indigenous tourism in PEI is still in its early stages; such as specialized accommodations, transportation options and dedicated cultural sites.
- **Economic Dependence on Seasonal tourism:** The peak tourism season in PEI (spring to fall) limits year-round business sustainability.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Many visitors are not fully aware of the Indigenous communities on PEI or their cultural significance.
- **Lack of Developed Products and Services:** There is a shortage of fully developed Indigenous tourism products and services as workforce and sector development efforts are still underway.

- **Opportunities**

- **Growing Interest in Indigenous Tourism:** There's a rising global demand for authentic Indigenous tourism experiences, presenting opportunities to PEI's Indigenous communities.

- **Sustainable Tourism Development:** Indigenous tourism aligns well with the growing movement toward sustainable and eco-friendly travel.
- **Partnership Opportunities:** There is growing interest among the private sector for collaborations and partnerships.
- **Cultural Education and Awareness:** There is an opportunity for Indigenous communities and businesses to foster reconciliation and increase public awareness of Indigenous culture and history in PEI through Indigenous tourism.
- **Threats**
 - **Cultural Misrepresentation or Appropriation:** There is a risk of cultural misrepresentation or appropriation if traditional customs or ceremonies are commercialized in ways that are inappropriate or do not accurately reflect their cultural significance.
 - **Competition from Other Destinations:** Other regions in Canada, such as British Columbia or Ontario, with more established Indigenous tourism infrastructures, may challenge PEI's ability to stand out in the market
 - **Access to Capital:** Indigenous entrepreneurs may face unique challenges in accessing the capital required to establish and expand their businesses.
 - **Climate Change:** PEI's coastal geography makes it vulnerable to the effects of climate change, which could negatively affect tourism activities, especially nature-based experiences.

SWOT Analysis – “Welcome to Abegweit” tourism experience:

- **Strengths**
 - **Cultural Richness:** The experience leveraged Abegweit's unique Mi'kmaw heritage and provided an authentic cultural engagement for visitors.
 - **Established Partnerships:** Collaboration with Fairway Tours and Venture America provided Abegweit with access to industry expertise, established markets, and operational support.
 - **Initial Capacity Building:** The initial investment in training and capacity development for community members established a solid foundation for the experience.
- **Weaknesses**
 - **Limited Control:** The Band's limited decision-making authority in the partnership resulted in a misalignment with the community's cultural values and economic objectives.
 - **Financial Viability:** Revenue generated from tours (initially \$13 per person) was insufficient to cover costs, raising sustainability concerns.
 - **Labor-Intensive Operations:** The significant demands on staff time and resources put considerable strain on the Band's already limited capacity.
- **Opportunities**
 - **Growing Indigenous Tourism Market:** The rising interest in Indigenous tourism offers diverse opportunities for growth.
 - **Product Expansion:** Abegweit could strategically leverage its partnership with Venture America and Fairway Tours to expand its offerings and experiences, using "Welcome to Abegweit" as a catalyst for growth.
 - **Local Entrepreneurial Empowerment:** The Band could transition the “Welcome to Abegweit” experience to a community member interested in Indigenous

tourism. This shift would enable the Band to decentralize some of its responsibilities while fostering entrepreneurial growth within the community.

- **Threats**

- **Market Pressures:** Intense competition from other tourism offerings in PEI's vibrant tourism landscape.
- **Potential Loss of Cultural Control:** While there is a strong case for partnership development and/or privatizing tourism efforts, it carries the risk of diluting cultural narratives if not carefully managed.
- **Economic Dependency:** Over-reliance on external partnerships could jeopardize long-term economic self-sufficiency for the Band.

Insights for Future Partnerships: Abegweit should prioritize partnerships that offer mutual benefit, flexible structures, and cultural respect. Clear communication of expectations and revenue-sharing models is essential.

2. **Prioritizing Partnerships with Non-Indigenous Entities:**

- Abegweit should consider a balanced approach. While partnerships with non-Indigenous entities can provide access to broader markets and expertise, exploring self-directed initiatives and collaborations with Indigenous-led organizations can enhance community control and ensure alignment with cultural values.

3. **Safeguarding Financial Interests and Operational Needs:**

- Specific measures could include:
 - Establishing clear contracts with defined roles and responsibilities.
 - Implementing a revenue-sharing model that reflects the Band's contributions.
 - Creating a governance framework that allows for ongoing review and adaptation of the partnership.

Utilizing frameworks like partnership agreements that prioritize community needs and cultural integrity would be beneficial.

4. **Ensuring Cultural Integrity and Community Values:**

- Abegweit can maintain cultural integrity by:
 - Developing guidelines that outline cultural representation and community involvement. These guidelines could include clear principles for how cultural elements are portrayed, ensuring that they are respectful and accurate, and avoid stereotypes or misrepresentations. The guidelines could also specify the roles and responsibilities of community members in tourism activities, encouraging active participation in planning, execution, and feedback processes. This involvement would foster a sense of ownership and pride among community members, as they contribute their knowledge and skills to the tourism experience.
 - Implementing feedback mechanisms to gather input from community members on tourism initiatives. Mechanisms may include surveys, questionnaires, community meetings, workshops, suggestion boxes, focus groups, social media engagement, advisory committees, public forums, and community newsletters.

- Establishing partnerships with organizations that are genuinely committed to respecting Indigenous cultures is crucial. This process should involve conducting thorough research on potential partners before formalizing any agreements, including reference checks and an assessment of their past practices. By ensuring that prospective partners share a dedication to cultural integrity, Abegweit First Nation can foster collaborations that are not only beneficial but also align with its values.

5. **Management of Tourism Initiatives:**

- While managing initiatives through the Band Government can ensure alignment with community values and objectives, a more privatized approach may enhance flexibility and innovation. Empowering local entrepreneurs can lead to diverse offerings and creative solutions that resonate with visitors. This approach alleviates capacity constraints within the Band by decentralizing responsibilities. Instead of the Band Government handling all aspects of tourism development, local entrepreneurs can take on the operational tasks, allowing the Band to focus on broader governance and strategic oversight. This shift enables the Band to concentrate on its core functions, such as policymaking, community engagement, infrastructure development and long-term planning, while fostering an environment where entrepreneurial initiatives can thrive.

6. **Challenges of a Privatized Tourism Model:**

- Potential challenges of privatization for Abegweit First Nation include loss of industry oversight, marketing control, and potential misalignment with community values. Additionally, the tourism industry is relatively immature and requires significant capital investment for growth. Relying solely on community members' private interests for this investment may slow sector development, resulting in opportunity costs. To address these challenges, the Band could:
 1. **Establish Clear Guidelines:** Create comprehensive guidelines that connect privatization efforts to community objectives, ensuring that cultural integrity and economic goals remain aligned.
 2. **Engage Community Stakeholders:** Involve community members in broader sector development initiatives. This participation helps ensure that entrepreneurs uphold consistent messaging and cultural identity within their tourism products and experiences.

Monitor and Evaluate Impacts: Implement a system to assess the effects of privatization on community well-being and economic outcomes. Regular evaluations will enable the Band to make informed adjustments and address any emerging challenges effectively.

7. **Role of Community Engagement:**

- Community engagement is crucial for ensuring that tourism initiatives reflect the Band's values and heritage. Abegweit can:
 - Conduct regular community meetings to discuss tourism planning.
 - Implement surveys and feedback forms to gather input from community members.

- Create advisory committees that include diverse voices from the community to guide tourism development.

8. Enhancing Internal Capacity for Tourism Development:

- To build human capital, the Band could focus on:
 - Providing training programs in tourism management, customer service, and cultural storytelling.
 - Partnering with educational institutions for workshops and skills development.
 - Securing funding for capacity-building initiatives that enhance the community's expertise and operational capabilities.
 - Secure funding for tourism infrastructure initiatives that enhance the local tourism ecosystem and create more accessible pathways for community members to enter the industry.

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